

Chris Gray:

Hi, I'm Chris Gray.

Scotty Sandow:

And I'm Scotty Sandow. And welcome back to the One Pill Can Kill podcast.

Chris Gray:

In our first episode in this series, you heard from Chris and Laura Didier, who lost their extraordinary son Zach to a fentanyl poisoning in 2020.

Scotty Sandow:

Zach thought he was buying a pharmaceutical Percocet off the street. But sadly, the pill was a counterfeit made with a deadly dose of fentanyl, which robbed Zach, his family and friends of a lifetime of memories together.

Chris Gray:

Fentanyl in the amount of just two grains of sand is enough to kill, experts say.

Scotty Sandow:

And the person responsible for selling a deadly pill to Zach was arrested by our Placer County Sheriff's Office and charged by our District Attorney's Office with manslaughter and selling controlled substances to a minor, resulting in great bodily injury. The first case filed where our DA's office held someone accountable for the death of another due to the sale of fentanyl.

Chris Gray:

As you're about to hear, justice has been served for Zach, his parents, and the people of Placer County.

Scotty Sandow:

On September 1st, Virgil Xavier Bordner was sentenced to 17 years in prison for Didier's death. We bring you now into the courtroom where a standing room only court is filled with the Didier family, friends, and attorneys on one side and the Bordner family, friends, and reporters on the other. The Honorable Placer Superior Court Judge Jeffrey Penny presiding.

Speaker 3:

All Rise. Superior Court of the State of California in and for the County of Placer is now in session. The Honorable Judge Jeffrey Penny is presiding.

Speaker 4:

All right, calling the case of the people of the State California court versus [inaudible 00:01:41]

Scotty Sandow:

Prior to the sentencing, the Didier family is allowed to address the court and read their impact statements. Here's a portion of those statements. Up first, Zach's older brother, Sam, followed by his mom, Laura and his dad, Chris.

Sam Didier:

My name is Sam Didier and I will be reading his letter on behalf of myself and my older sister, Ali Didier, who could not make it here today. Every day is a day without our beloved brother, Zach. He was the life of the party and he would never fail to make us laugh slap and be a part of all of our adventures. And while our words in this letter are finite, it is impossible for us to sum up how wonderful of a brother he is and the amount of precious experiences that we have had with him. My future family and kids won't be able to experience his infectious [inaudible 00:02:34] and how excited I was to tell my future spouse about the amazing brothers I'm so blessed to have. But now have to say that he won't be able to even get to those. We have inside jokes that I will never be able to say to anyone again.

Sam Didier:

And there's so many conversations that I wanted to have with him, but I can't anymore. Losing Zach was kind of like losing a part of me. I really struggled choosing what to share as I don't talk about just often. And most of my thoughts of my brother will stay with me until I joined him. But I just hope it was clear how much he meant to so many people. [inaudible 00:03:17] thoughts shared along with the other statements that will be read today, Ali and I know that Zach's presence and love will be known throughout the courtroom. Thank you.

Laura Didier:

And I and Chris and our other kids had to see things we never thought we would. There are no words to describe what it does to mother's heart to see your baby [inaudible 00:03:50] nothing can bring him back.

Chris Didier:

On December 27, 2020 our precious son, Zach, died unexpectedly in the comfort of his bedroom. It was only then that I learned about the dangers and pervasiveness of fentanyl poisoning and accessibility through social media. Zach was a self-taught musician, a straight A student, a multi-sport athlete. He played the lead role as Laura mentioned in High School Musical and was active with scouting and several community service programs. Since this passing, Zach was accepted into five UCs, including UCLA. Like so many who died from fentanyl poisoning, Zach clearly demonstrated success and showed promise to bringing innovation and progress to our world in a beautiful way. Instead, he was robbed of that chance.

Chris Didier:

There is a rapidly growing crisis involving illicit fentanyl, disguised as prescription pills and has especially impacted young adults in our community. The actions of the defendant providing counterfeit pills have greatly affected our lives in the worst possible way. We will never be able to hug or hold our son ever again or simply share the regular joys of life with Zach. We will never be able to witness Zach's potential in life and accomplishments he was destined to achieve. We will never witness his future success as a college graduate, a successful coworker, an older brother, an uncle, a husband, or a loving father. Sadly, this fentanyl crisis has impacted thousands of families and our nation continues to see these losses every single day.

Chris Gray:

After the impact statements are read, Judge Penny hands down the sentence.

Speaker 7:

For the violation of [inaudible 00:05:54] 192 [inaudible 00:05:55], as charged in count 1 felony, involuntary manslaughter, the defendant is sentenced to the State Prison of California for subordinate and consecutive term of one year-

Scotty Sandow:

In all, Bordner is sentenced to 17 years in prison.

Speaker 7:

Mr Bordner is hereby remaining to the custody of Placer Sherif to be delivered [inaudible 00:06:19]

Chris Gray:

The Didier family and Placer County district attorney, Morgan Gire, sat down to share their thoughts after the sentencing.

Sam Didier:

Today's a big day for me. It's a big day for all of us. I came all the way out from Mississippi. Flew however many hours it took because I really wanted to be here, not just for seeing my family, but also today is a day for closure on this chapter. It's not the end of Zach's story, it's not the end of what happened, but this chapter is finally getting some sense of an end. I've been to this courtroom that we're at right now, however many times before, and although we're still going to keep fighting and doing what we're trying to do, at least we can close the book on what we're doing here.

Scotty Sandow:

So you come from an age demographic where you can more closely relate to what's going on in this country and maybe to some of the struggles that people your age face. So what is your message for anyone, young adult, teenager that is just struggling with life in general?

Sam Didier:

I think you make a good point that it makes a big difference when the message about this is coming from a parent or an adult versus somebody my age. Because over the last however many decades we've had campaigns and campaigns and awareness this, awareness that about say no to drugs and commercials with people's getting eggs destroyed by frying pans or something. I don't really remember, but I think that's numbed a lot of people. And they hear this message and if it's given to them by a teacher or by an adult, then they can shut their brains off and be like, Okay, they don't know what's going on. We know what's going on. We don't have to listen to that. But the message that I would give to people my age is to pay attention and at the end of the day, just be a homie to other people.

Sam Didier:

I think I mentioned that at one of the backyard events we did. But look out for your friends and if you see them experimenting, be educated on what the dangers are. Be educated on the fact that what happened to my brother can happen to anybody. And you could be the one person to save your friend's life if you're given that opportunity. If they're not going to listen to the parents, their teachers then it's kind of going to be up to you to be the one to actually step in and save them.

Sam Didier:

I like to just make sure that it's known that this is a real thing. This is happening. Because whenever you consume media, you read news stories, you listen to podcasts, in this case, you might listen to it and think, Oh, it's just a story. This is something that's not happening in my reality in my country, in my state, in my city, in my county or whatever. But this is everywhere. It's all across the country. It's affecting families from all different backgrounds. It's not something that discriminates. And so if you're listening to this right now, try to take away that this is something that's happening in everyone's world and it would be smart to learn more about it, to educate yourself and to try to help and protect other people as much as you can.

Chris Gray:

And helping and protecting our community is just what the Didier family is going to do. Laura explains.

Laura Didier:

Starting this fall to be able to really do so much more awareness and it's taking up so much more time and it is a more hopeful part of our journey to talk to these young people. And so I was very grateful that this criminal justice process, we can now close the chapter on that, as Sam said, and really just focus on the hopeful part of it. The part where maybe we can save other families from this pain and our son's story, that we didn't lose him in vain and that his story will resonate with other families to, and then they understand, like Sam said, that it can impact any family.

Scotty Sandow:

It indeed does impact families. Zach's dad, Chris Didier offers some parting words of advice for parents on how to talk to their children about fentanyl and dangerous illicit street drugs.

Chris Didier:

My message to the parents is to get to know this danger and talk to your kids. I think if you lock their phones down or you restrict them, might be a temporary fix but they are always workarounds. I promise you there are. And I can tell you exactly how those workarounds work. So it's important to have a sit down conversation with them and just say, I'm afraid and help me understand what's going on in your world. And I honestly believe your teens will have an above board conversation. And the message to the teens, I can't say it any better than Sam, watch out for each other. First of all, learn about this danger and understand that the dealers out there, they don't care about you. They care about the money you give them. And fentanyl is far more potent than most likely can understand and will ever understand.

Chris Didier:

I've learned with newer cases since Zach died that, and this is how I'm saying it now, this fentanyl will kill you fast and it can kill you slow. So if you have an encounter with fentanyl like Zach and die, that sucks. If you somehow manage to survive that, now you're battling the shackles of addiction. And there are sadly many cases of young adults who survive their first encounter and felt really bad and want to recover but don't and have a new encounter three or four months later and die from a counterfeit pill. So please be aware of the danger and avoid it.

Morgan Gire:

The advocacy portion of this is just beginning.

Scotty Sandow:

This is Placer County District Attorney Morgan Gire. He's at the forefront of Placer County's charged against fentanyl in the courtroom and in our community with the One Pill Can Kill Placer Campaign.

Morgan Gire:

This is still, today is the end of the criminal case, but it's one more step forward for the advocacy and education portion that's going to be the only way to get us out of this mess.

Scotty Sandow:

Can you maybe speak to what that campaign means to you and what your hope is?

Morgan Gire:

Yeah. This campaign personally provides me so much pride and inspiration because it shows that the community cares. We have tragedies all the time. We deal with those in this office all the time. But rarely do they provide an opportunity to engage with the community about something that could affect them. We have gun violence, we have domestic violence, we have all sorts of bad things that occur in society, but the opportunity to engage every aspect of our community in this campaign, I think helps one shine a light on the seriousness of this issue. But I think it inspires others to be louder and think outside the box on how to communicate other dangers as well. Maybe we do make an impact on violence in the home through our efforts of organizing around a fentanyl campaign. I hope this inspires and catalyzes other groups to think about how they can engage our schools and our parents and have difficult conversations to try and have sort of a general prevention of harm across our community.

Morgan Gire:

So I think on a general level, this campaign has done that. Specific to fentanyl, I think it's making a difference. We have already in the last few weeks reached over 12,000 high school students. And we have a small enough community that we hear from friends and their kids and kids who are attended these rallies outside of the criminal justice system that these kids come home and they're talking to their parents about it and they're saying, Here's what I heard today. And oh my God, this kid, Zach and it's such a small town that so many students have a couple of degrees of separation from Zach and they know someone who knew him and it becomes real to them.

Morgan Gire:

And this campaign has allowed these parents who have suffered these losses and these brothers and these sisters to come in and share their stories. And that is having an impact. And I firmly believe that it's saving lives. The kids that come up to the parents afterward and say they're so sorry or that they know someone who's struggling with it and that they never realize that what their friend was doing could be this serious and that they are doing something about it. This campaign is doing that and it is providing that opportunity for the average person not otherwise involved in criminal cases or fentanyl to be able to do something about it. And that makes it all worth it.

Scotty Sandow:

What's your message for anyone who is actively selling counterfeit illicit drugs, illegal drugs in Placer County or someone considering it as a pathway forward?

Morgan Gire:

That message is easy. We will pursue you as aggressively as we can. Everyone now knows that these pills are fake and they are deadly. And that if you are selling them, you are very likely going to kill someone. So we will use every available tool in our arsenal within the criminal justice system to hold you accountable. And that message will get out there. I think it already is, but that is what we will do in this community. We will not tolerate people coming in to poison our youth, to inflict the deadliness of this fentanyl on our community. And we take each and every one of these cases very seriously and we will try and use every resource available to hold somebody accountable to the fullest extent.

Scotty Sandow:

My last question is, do you have any final messages for our community?

Morgan Gire:

For those that have been aware and have seen the One Pill Can Kill campaign, I would encourage them to share and spread the message to those that haven't. Many people don't engage until it affects them directly, but this is one step away from affecting them directly. Everyone in this county probably knows someone who's either dealing with a substance abuse issue, has someone in their life who need some help that they may not know about it. So those that are just now learning about it or haven't yet, engage and find out what it's all about because a few simple steps and a few simple conversations could prevent someone from dying.

Chris Gray:

And you, the listener, have already taken a giant step by listening to this podcast. But there's more you can do to make a difference in your community.

Scotty Sandow:

Have a conversation with someone you know about the fentanyl crisis.

Chris Gray:

Visit the One Pill Can Kill website at 1pillcankillplacer.com for more information and resources. That's with a numeral one.

Scotty Sandow:

And Share. Share this podcast series and the One Pill Can Kill Placer website. Thanks again for listening.